

California Department of Veterans Affairs

NEWS JOURNAL

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NEWSLETTER

October 2003

From The Desk Of The Secretary:

September has been very busy at the Department on a number of fronts. We have seen progress with the future veterans homes, progress within the current homes, and positive legislation for the Cal-Vet Home Loan program and continued fine service from our Veterans Services Division.

The Capital Development and Construction Division is continuing the design of the future veterans homes in West Los Angeles, Lancaster and Ventura. The Division has already acquired sites for both future Redding and Fresno Homes. The Division has also begun the planning and design of these homes as it makes application to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs for funding of these projects. All this in spite of the Assembly's inability to pass Assembly Bill 1736, which would have given the Construction Division the ability to use already approved bond money for the new homes, while working toward receiving federal funding participation with the projects.

The Construction Division has also recently received Federal matching fund commitment for over \$13.5 million for three projects at the Yountville Home.

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VETERANS ACROSS GENERATIONS

*Lynn Scott
Public Affairs Officer
Yountville Veterans Home*

After a veteran has served his country, he still has something unique to offer: his story. In the case of many of Yountville's veterans, their stories and their values are carried forward by their children who join the military and follow their example.

One example, a resident at the Veterans Home for eight years, is retired Air force Colonel Dick Hum. His son is Air Force Chaplain (Col.) Richard Hum who serves at the Pentagon as the Executive Director of the Armed Forces Chaplains Board. His Grandson is 2nd Lieutenant Brian Hum who has just graduated from the Air Force Academy and is starting his training as a pilot. The Hum's represent three generations in the Air Force. In addition, to demonstrate their support for veterans issues they are all members of AMVETS.

Another example of this Veterans Home familial trend is retired Army Staff Sergeant Wes N. McGirr. His son, Sergeant Wes A. McGirr, visited the Home after serving in both the recent Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Wes A. McGirr is a paratrooper and member of the Army's elite Special Forces.

He agreed to be interviewed at the Home's TV station, KVET Channel 33. The Home's resident veterans were eager to chat with Wes and to hear a first-hand, unfiltered account of the Middle East conflict from a soldier's perspective. During the interview, the Home's residents were fascinated by the similarities and differences that today's soldiers experience in modern warfare.

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NEWS FROM CHULA VISTA

John Smith

*Public Information Officer
Chula Vista Veterans Home*

We are happy to announce that as of September 19, 2003 the transfer of all the skilled nursing residents from our sister facility in Barstow has been completed. During the transfer, 64 of Barstow's most medically challenged residents were accepted into the Skilled Nursing Facility here in Chula Vista. For the most part they are all becoming acclimated to their new southern California coastal environment and are doing very well.

In last month's Resident Town hall meeting, the residents created a Resident's Allied Council and elected a new slate of officers. World War II Army veteran John J. Tierney was elected to the Chairman's position. Mr. Tierney has been a resident of the Veterans Home since November of 2000 and is affectionately known to all of us as "JJ." At the Vice Chairman's position is Mr. James Jones. Mr. Jones is a former Marine and World War II veteran. Since his admission to the Veterans Home in November of 2001, Mr. Jones has been involved in many projects here on the Chula Vista campus. Jones just recently completed a tour of duty as the Quartermaster of our Chula Vista Veterans Home VFW Post #83.

The Veterans Home of California-Chula Vista is proud to host the October meeting of the California Veterans Board.

In every volunteer organization, the most demanding position is the role of Secretary. He or she is responsible for the minutes, the scheduling of meetings, posting information, correspondence and much more. Our new Allied Council Secretary is Mr. John A. Chismar. "Chizz" (as he is known to both staff and residents) is a Navy veteran of the Korean War who joined our Veteran Home family in January

of 2003. Chizz is up for the task and welcomes his new responsibilities. Rounding out the elected members of the Council is another Navy veteran of the Korean War, Mr. Edward R. Morse. The "R" in his middle name stands for Robert and he is known as "Bob" throughout the campus. Currently, Bob is the editor in chief of the "Veteran's Home Gazette." The paper serves as the monthly resident's newsletter. He will fill the role of editor of the Allied Council's newsletter. Congratulations to all of the new officers of the Chula Vista Veterans Home Allied Council.

On behalf of the staff and residents of the Veterans Home, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and thanks to the members of the Chula Vista Veterans Home Support Foundation (CVVHSF). The Foundation is a State of California constituted 501 C3 non-profit corporation whose sole purpose for existence is to provide support to this Veterans Home. Since their formation in late 1999, the CVVHSF has been a primary source of financial, community, and political support for the residents of this Veterans Home and the mission of the California Department of Veterans Affairs. For example, in a recent Board meeting held here on campus, they voted to donate \$6000 towards our Holiday fund and \$2500 towards our resident's Internet costs. The Foundation has covered 100% of the yearly cost of providing Internet services to all of the Resident Computer labs on campus. The Board members of the CVVHSF include elected officials, business leaders, community leaders, and dedicated veterans. The current Chairman is retired Navy Captain Robert White. Capt. White is also the Chairman of the Chula Vista Veterans Advisory Commission.

The Veterans Home of California-Chula Vista is proud to host the October meeting of the California Veterans Board. The meeting will be held on Friday, October 17, 2003 in the "F" building at 9:00 am. We look forward to this yearly visit by the Cal-Vet Board.

VETERANS ACROSS GENERATIONS

Wes said, "Afghanistan is extremely desolate; it's like the Nevada desert but the terrain was more broken and without the sage brush." He also talked about the power and versatility of today's combat gear including armored laptop computers, the Internet and satellite global positioning systems (GPS). While all of the information and communication gear is vital, Wes said, "It was very hard to walk ten or twelve miles per day and manage a one-hundred plus pound pack in such rough terrain—some things, apparently, never change."

He then described how he was pinned down in a firefight and became the first combat causality in Afghanistan. For his injuries, he received the Purple Heart. Within hours of his injury and medical evacuation, his group was hit by friendly fire and several of his friends were killed. Others were badly injured.

Wes continued, "Post war Iraq is not like what you see on TV. Actually, nearly all of the Iraqi people want the U.S. and Coalition Forces in their country. The people are wonderful and they know that they need a lot of help to achieve a stable government. It is a small remnant of Saddam Hussein's hard-core troops along with a steady stream of terrorists that sneak across the border which cause the continued conflict and the political unrest."

The Veterans Home residents listened with rapt attention as Wes described the recent military and social life in Iraq. Over to the side of the studio, Wes N. McGirr watched the interview with pride. Later he said, "My son's had amazing experience and some very close calls. He has served his country and he's a hero, but I'm relieved that he is safe and back in the States. We should not forget the men and women who are still in harm's way."

The Veterans Home in Yountville is rich with 119 years of tradition. It is also a community with ties that stretch

across the State and the world. Still, the Home's greatest assets are the storied lives of the people who reside in this special place—a place that honors, cares for and listens to those who protected this country's freedom.

For each of us, our life is contained in our stories. The Veterans Home in Yountville has a program for sharing these stories across generations. According to Home resident Lionel Hvolboll, "The Home's Oral History Program is a good way to recall things that you have stored in the 'way back' part of your mind. This program helps you make sense out of the continuum from birth to now, and beyond. It's excellent therapy and the stories will become increasingly important as time goes on."

EMPLOYEE CORNER

REMINDER: All employees wishing to change their health and dental insurance or flex options are reminded that the month of October is the time for such changes. All changes made will become effective January 1, 2004. Any questions? Call Monica Magana at 916-651-7838.

SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS: Please submit your nominations for Employee of the Third Quarter (July through September 2003) no later than October 17, 2003. Any questions? Call Sneh Rattan at 916-653-5386.

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PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS FRIENDS TO CHULA VISTA VETERANS HOME

The veterans living in the Chula Vista Veterans Home would like to thank the San Diego Chargers, the San Diego County Board of Education, and the City of San Diego for their generous donation of football tickets to many of the San Diego Charger's home games. Of the last four games played at Qualcomm stadium, home members were privileged to attend three of them. The next home game will be a Monday night game between the Chargers and the Miami Dolphins on October 27th. The home's residents are looking forward to the opportunity to participate in the tradition of this nationally televised event being hosted here in San Diego. **Go Chargers!!!!**

Thanks also go out to the San Diego Padres Baseball club for their generous donation of tickets throughout the season. The home's residents have enjoyed their visits to the stadium throughout this past season. Recently, home members were invited to attend the last professional baseball game played in San Diego Qualcomm Stadium this past September 28th between the San Diego Padres and the Colorado Rockies. All had a great time. Next year, the San Diego Padres will host the 2004 baseball season in the newest baseball stadium in the nation, "Petco Park." Home members have assurances from the San Diego Padres organization that the home's relationship with them will continue into the new season and the new ballpark. Home residents extend a most sincere thanks to the owner of the San Diego Padres, Mr. John Moores, for his generosity and support for the elderly veterans of California. **Go Padres!!!**

California Veterans Homes Statistics

Total census as of 10/03/03

Barstow – Total 146

Domiciliary – 102
Intermediate Care – 44
Skilled Nursing – 0

Chula Vista – Total 324

Domiciliary – 149
Assisted Living (RCFE) – 50
Skilled Nursing – 125

Yountville – Total 1071 (5 acute)

Domiciliary – 630
Assisted Living (RCFE) – 74
Intermediate Care – 142
Skilled Nursing Care – 220

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From The Desk Of The Secretary:

In addition, plans have been finalized for the Northern California Veterans Cemetery in Shasta County and should be going out to bid soon.

In the Veterans Homes Division, Yountville recently successfully completed their annual State Department of Health Services survey. Chula Vista, last month, opened its final skilled nursing unit and is now licensed and fully operational as a 400-bed facility. Barstow has concluded the transfer process of its skilled nursing residents and will now begin the process of stabilizing current programs and staff while exploring future options for growth.

The Cal-Vet Home Loan program got a plus with the passage of Assembly Bill 1036. This legislation allows Cal-Vet Home Loans to reduce down payments, increase maximum loan amounts for certain purchases, and offers down payment assistance to qualifying individuals.

Veterans Services continues to provide assistance to veterans with tuition fee wavier benefits, Veterans License Plate Program, and the Property Tax Exemption benefit, in addition to working with the County Veterans Services Offices.

Overall, it was a busy and positive month for the Department. Congratulations to all.

K. Maurice Johannessen